

HRCSL International Day in Support of Victims of Torture – 2025

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) conducted **International Day in Support of Victims of Torture – 2025** a comprehensive four-day programme, an account from 23rd to 26th June 2025, under the theme “ඒ මම වෙනත් පුළුවන්” (It Could Be Me). This four day programme reflected HRCSL’s ongoing commitment to raising public awareness, promoting legal reform, and enhancing institutional accountability regarding torture and custodial violence. The theme “ඒ මම වෙනත් පුළුවන්” served as a reminder that torture is not an abstract concept confined to distant conflicts or criminal investigations it is a human rights violation that can touch anyone, regardless of background, identity, or circumstance. This theme compels us to confront an uncomfortable but essential truth: in the face of shifting power dynamics, social unrest, or mistaken identity, any one of us, our family, our friends, or ourselves could find our rights stripped away and be subjected to inhumane treatment. Events were held across key locations including the Police College in Kalutara, Tower Hall Theatre, and Taj Samudra Hotel in Colombo.

The first two days of the programme series aimed at newly recruited police officers in Police Collage, Kalutara with a view to create a culture of respect for human rights within the police



force, ensuring that officers are equipped with the knowledge and tools to prevent torture and other human rights violations. Central feature of this training was a drama depicted of a “real-lifed incident” followed by lectures on torture related legal framework, a session by a Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) on the forensic aspects of torture followed by, interactive discussions. This method of training aimed to move beyond conventional training by creating a deeper emotional and

cognitive understanding among police officers, encouraging them also to convince the importance of upholding human dignity and adhering to the law in their future duties.





The third day highlighted the use of visual storytelling with a view to deepen public understanding of violence and its impact. The day began at 9:00 AM with the screening of the film 'WONDER', exclusively for school children. This emotionally impactful film encouraged students to reflect on empathy, difference, and the need for kindness in the face of adversity. The screening was

followed by a discussion focusing on the psychosocial impact of school-based violence by a Consultant, Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist.

In the afternoon, from 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM, the Tamil film 'Jai Bhim' was screened for law enforcement officials, students and law professionals. The film, was based on real life events, and served as an essential source of inspiration, illustrating the role of ethical lawyering, the importance of fighting for the voiceless, and the need for legal advocacy rooted in empathy and justice.



The day concluded with a panel discussion which served as a platform to engage in a comprehensive examination of the systemic factors and institutional challenges highlighted by the film, particularly those related to torture and broader human rights violations. The conversations led by Prof. Farzana Haniffa, Commissioner of the HRCSL and the guest speakers who participated were, Mr. Prashantha Lal De Alwis PC, Mr. Thishya Weragoda AAL and Mr. Nimal G. Punchihewa, Commissioner HRCSL. Panellists were contributed their expert perspectives on the complexities involved in addressing



torture within legal and societal frameworks, including the obstacles survivors encounter in their pursuit of justice and the critical need for robust mechanisms of accountability and redress.



Morning session on day four featured a compelling street drama performed at the Fort railway station premises and the nearby private bus stand located on Bastian Mawatha. Presented by students from the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, the drama focused on the negative impact of torture and inhuman treatment on the general public. The performance aimed at raising awareness and emphasize the urgent need to end such practices and uphold human dignity.



The final event marked with a high level panel discussion on the “General Guidelines and Recommendations No. 1 of 2025 on Preventing Custodial and Encounter Deaths.” The panel discussion was led by Ms. Ermiza Tegal, AAL and the guest speakers who participated were Dr. Gehan Gunatillake, Commissioner HRCSL, Inspector General of Police, Mr. Priyantha Weerasooriya and Mr. Saliya Peiris PC. Commissioners and officials of the HRCSL, senior government officials, judicial medical officers, representatives from the tri forces and law enforcement institutions, legal professionals, and civil society stakeholders gathered to discuss the national framework and strategic reforms needed to eliminate torture and deaths in custody. Recommendations were made for further collaborations, training initiatives, and legal amendments. The discussion reflected Sri Lanka’s strong commitment to combat torture and promote human dignity at all levels.



The four-day commemoration served as a powerful platform to educate, advocate, and engage diverse sectors of society. It reaffirmed that the fight against torture is a collective responsibility, and HRCSL remains dedicated to leading this effort.

